

Performance Funding Cycle 2005-2010
Survey Sub-Committee Update
July 13, 2004

Background

The Survey sub-committee of the Performance Funding Advisory Committee met on April 20 to discuss the direction of the sub-committee and to review three surveys: Enrolled Student Survey, Alumni Survey, and Employer Survey. Since this initial meeting, the sub-committee has consistently communicated via e-mail to gather additional information and in an attempt to reach consensus. This document offers a summary of our thoughts and recommendations with regard to each of the three surveys for the 2005-2010 Performance Funding cycle.

Enrolled Student Survey

The Enrolled Student Survey (ESS) has been a mainstay in Performance Funding and the Survey sub-committee recommends that ESS continue in the 2005-2010 cycle.

Based on the Advisory Committee's suggestion to consider replacing the current Blank State Survey with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), the sub-committee has reviewed information from both NSSE and CCSSE regarding costs, administration, benchmarks, and peer institutions. All sub-committee members recognize the benefits of national benchmarks, however, some members are concerned about the reliability and validity of NSSE based on the low response rates. While the NSSE and CCSSE survey instruments are similar, the sampling plans are drastically different leading to different response rates. For the reason, the sub-committee considered each survey separately.

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

Based on concerns regarding the response rates, the sub-committee talked with representatives from the Tennessee public universities who administered NSSE in the last two years (6 of 9 universities). The most cited reasons for conducting NSSE were the peer comparisons of similar institutions, the benefits during SACS accreditation, and the usefulness of institutional data to student affairs and academic affairs departments. None of the universities currently administering the NSSE indicated plans to stop doing so. However, there is some concern that the benefits of NSSE are not worth the costs (\$5,500 - \$7,750 depending on enrollment), especially given the low response rates.

Response rates among Tennessee public universities range from 18% to 27%, which is below the national mean of roughly 40%. The primary reason for these low response rates is the administration mode of surveying students via e-mail. Since many students use multiple e-mail addresses and due to the rising frequency of SPAM messages, students are less likely to complete the NSSE than the Blank State Survey which has been administered during class.

Despite these low response rates, NSSE claims that the findings are representative of all students based on the number of students surveyed. However, for institutions concerned by the low response rates, NSSE recommends using incentives such as drawings for free lunches or book store gift certificates, which have yielded higher response rates.

Due to these concerns with response rates, the sub-committee considered administering NSSE using the Blank State sampling strategy of in-class surveys. While NSSE does allow institutions to do so, data collected from in-class surveys cannot be included in national benchmark comparisons. Therefore, if institutions are interested in peer comparisons or national benchmarks, they must use the stratified random sample of students via e-mail or mailing paper surveys.

The sub-committee recognizes that institutions have much to gain by administering NSSE, however our committee has not reached consensus as to whether NSSE is worth the cost. For the two-thirds of universities (6) already using NSSE the costs would not be substantial and, in fact, would reduce costs by eliminating the Blank State Enrolled Student Survey. For the three universities that are not using NSSE, the costs of switching from the local Blank State to NSSE could be an issue, especially given the concerns with response rates.

Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)

While response rates are not cause for concern, similar cost benefit considerations apply to the CCSSE. Unlike the NSSE, this survey is administered in-class similar to the Blank State Survey. With this exception, the NSSE and CCSSE have similar benefits of national benchmarking, SACS significance, and detailed institutional data. However, the CCSSE has a smaller proportion of all community college participating, which mitigates some of the benefits of peer comparisons since fewer peers are administering CCSSE. In fact, a sub-committee member suggested that our in-state institutions yield better measures of comparison than national peers.

As with the NSSE, the sub-committee sought feedback from community college representatives. Although none of the Tennessee community colleges are currently participating in CCSSE, the Performance Funding Coordinators provided feedback on the proposed switch from the Blank State survey. The responses ranged from institutions that already planned to administer CCSSE for the national benchmarks to others who were concerned with the costs (\$3,600 - \$6,000 depending on enrollment). These costs include the discounted rate that CCSSE is willing to give if the entire system participates. (NSSE does not offer discounted rates for consortia of institutions.)

The sub-committee has been communicating with CCSSE staff regarding specific sampling procedures and their expected increase in participating institutions. Based on these discussions and the clear benefits and relevance of national benchmarks to Tennessee institutions, the sub-committee recommends that the Performance Funding Advisory Committee replace the Blank State survey with CCSSE for all public community colleges.

Alumni Survey

As with the Enrolled Student Survey, and based on two cycles of success with the Alumni Survey, the sub-committee recommends that the Alumni Survey continue in the 2005-2010 Performance Funding cycle.

Given the sub-committee's desire to align the Alumni Survey with the Enrolled Student Survey, we will consider this survey after a decision has been reached with regard to NSSE and CCSSE. Should the Performance Funding guidelines switch to NSSE and CCSSE, the sub-committee would recommend that an Alumni Survey be created using some current survey items and by borrowing many survey items from the NSSE and CCSSE instruments. We have contacted each organization and both would be willing to cooperate.

On the other hand, if the Performance Funding requirement maintains the Blank State Survey with or without alterations, then the sub-committee would work to align the Alumni Survey with the new survey and possibly keep some survey items for longitudinal analysis.

Employer Satisfaction Project

Based on the experience of the 2002-03 Employer Satisfaction Project, the sub-committee recommends that this project be included in the 2005-2010 cycle.

One of the best elements of this project was the flexibility for each institution to determine which subset of students' employers would be considered (i.e., department, college, recent graduates) and how employer satisfaction would be measured (i.e., survey, focus group, telephone interview). However, institutions used employer surveys yielding data of varying levels of usefulness. For this reason, the sub-committee will create a sample survey borrowing from the 2002-03 project surveys. The sub-committee will also create a list of alternate means to gauge employer satisfaction, such as focus groups, employer interviews, and telephone surveys.

The sub-committee would also like to maintain the practice of awarding points based on project completion and preliminary reporting of results rather than a comparison of results. Since institutions may choose different units of analysis and different measures to study satisfaction, a comparison between institutions or over time would be nearly impossible. However, the sub-committee will develop a rubric by which THEC must approve each institution's employer satisfaction project. This quality control measure is designed to ensure that each institution's Employer Satisfaction Project collects enough useful data to benefit the institution and, when results from all institutions' projects are compiled, an adequate update for state-wide goals.

Proposed Survey Cycle 2005-2010

2005-06 Enrolled Student Survey
2006-07 Alumni Survey
2007-08 Employer Satisfaction Project
2008-09 Enrolled Student Survey
2009-10 Alumni Survey

Next Steps for Survey Sub-Committee

Once a decision has been reached on the NSSE and CCSSE, the sub-committee could begin a thorough review of the survey instruments to determine which items will be used for performance funding purposes. If NSSE and CCSSE replace the Blank State Survey, then this process could also include deciding on comparison groups for institutional means (i.e., national peer institutions, state averages, prior year averages, etc.). A similar process could be followed for the Alumni Survey.

With the exception of the Employer Satisfaction Project, the sub-committee has not considered the allocation of Performance Funding points or comparison groups for the ESS and AS. These considerations are clearly the next steps, but we do not want to overstep the scope of the sub-committee. We would be happy to consider and make recommendations with regard to scoring points and comparison groups if the Advisory Committee would like for us to do so.

Finally, regarding the Employer Satisfaction Project, the sub-committee will begin creating a document that includes suggested projects, sample surveys, and the rubric by which projects will be accepted. These tasks will likely lead to at least one additional meeting in Knoxville and frequent communication via e-mail and telephone.